



# DHS Matters!

Michigan Department of Human Services • Lansing, Michigan • December 13, 2006  
Produced by DHS Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing  
Submit stories by e-mail to [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## On the doorstep of adulthood

### *Twins, former foster children, are exemplars for successful youth in transition*

EAST LANSING – **Nicole and Natalie Kyles** (pictured l-r at right) are twin 18-year-olds from Kalamazoo that have seen a lot more than most teenagers on their way to where they are today – freshman at Michigan State University, living in dorms, and attending school in pre-nursing and psychology majors, respectively.

Nicole and Natalie were removed from their mother – herself a 14-year-old foster child – about six months after birth and entered foster care. A Kalamazoo couple adopted them at age 8 and their adoptive mother died when they were 16. Living in several foster and adoptive placements, Nicole and Natalie were always placed together and learned at age 14 that they have a half-brother who was placed with a grandparent. They've seen a lot of good and bad in foster care including domestic violence. They have received many services, including counseling and Youth In Transition, and both have worked on ways to fit into families, a burden they say is common to foster children.

They transitioned out of foster care in 2004, graduated from Kalamazoo Loy Norrix High School this spring, and enrolled at MSU in August. They use funds from Tuition Incentive Program, Education & Training Vouchers, grants and earnings to attend school.

They were in Lansing Nov. 13 to receive laptop computers that will aid them at MSU. The Children's Benefit Fund – which is administered by the Michigan Children's Institute – was used to purchase the computers. The fund has a limited budget, said Bruce Hoffman of the MCI, and it isn't always used. DHS policy says it can be used, "...for education beyond that otherwise available to the ward, or for emergency living expenses during or following termination of wardship."



**Natalie Kyles with some important people from her life (l-r): Jane Mecomber and Nona Spackman of Kalamazoo DHS and Donald Magett, her grandfather.**

Natalie and Nicole contacted Kalamazoo County DHS about their need for laptops where **Nona Spackman**, their foster care worker (and MSU graduate), and **Jane Mecomber**, the supervisor, determined they would be eligible for services from both Youth in Transition and Child Benefit Funds. They pursued Child Benefit Funds for this purpose so YIT funds could be used in the future.

The Kyles' secrets to success – keep plugging away, never give up, set goals for yourself, always try to find the good in others, and never be afraid to reach out and ask for help on your way to accomplishment.

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■ Youth in Transition, Children's Benefit Funds and Education & Training Vouchers (ETV) are DHS-administered services for older foster children transitioning to adulthood. See the ETV fact sheet at [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Education\\_and\\_Training\\_Voucher\\_111887\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Fact_Sheet_Education_and_Training_Voucher_111887_7.pdf)

## St. Clair County workers support our own and our troops

From Barb LaRue, Community Resource Coordinator  
St. Clair DHS, Port Huron  
[LaRueB@michigan.gov](mailto:LaRueB@michigan.gov)

In preparation for Halloween, **Peggy Graza** put some items together to send to her son, Jared, a Marine serving overseas. This sparked an idea from **Kim Hurlburt** to get the rest of the staff in on it.

"The idea caught on quickly as almost everyone knows someone who has been involved in this war," Kim said.

"My brother-in-law was there so I know how much they need things and appreciate them!"

"The box is full and I collected \$110 for more gifts and shipping. We work with very generous people! Many of whom have loved ones over there.

"We are going to continue to send these boxes every couple of months, mostly to let them know we have not forgotten them and the sacrifices made by them and their families!"

Jared Ross joined the Marine reserves out of Saginaw shortly after graduating from high school. He has been active duty since June 2006 and is currently serving in Fallujah, Iraq. He expects to come home in April or May 2007.

Jared's mom, Peggy Garza, has worked for the state for more than 30 years in both Sanilac and St. Clair counties. Jared's sister, **Jaime Idzior**, works as an eligibility specialist in Isabella County. Anyone wishing to write Jared can do so at this address: LCPL Jared A Ross, 1/24 B CO 2nd Platoon, Unit 43590, FPO AP 96426-3590.

■ **Peggy Garza is a family independence specialist and Kim Hurlburt is an eligibility specialist with St. Clair County DHS.**



**Kim Hurlburt (left) and Peggy Garza with the box of goodies members of the St. Clair DHS office put together to send to Peggy's son, a Marine seen in the photo at right.**

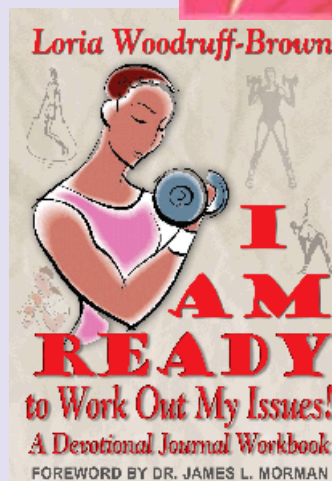
## DHS employee publishes self-help tool

From Loria Woodruff-Brown, Administrative Services Manager  
Oakland County DHS, Pontiac  
[Wodruff-Brown@michigan.gov](mailto:Wodruff-Brown@michigan.gov)

**Loria Woodruff-Brown** (right) has published what she calls a "devotional journal workbook"; it's called "I Am Ready to Work Out My Issues" and costs \$14.99 plus \$2.99 shipping. The faith-based self-help tool is available through the author's Web site – [www.workingoutmyissues.com](http://www.workingoutmyissues.com)

"I urge you to self-discovery by overcoming life challenges with precision and purpose," she said. "So I offer you a book with mental exercises that will get you to read more and move you from fear to faith."

"My mission is not just to arouse you to make life decisions to change, but to provoke you to think anew how different your life can be!"



## Notable December dates

Everyone knows December is famous for holidays. We get two four-day weekends this month, Dec. 23-26 and Dec. 30-Jan. 2, 2007. Did you know these other notable dates in December?

**Dec. 3** The Cold War ended 1989.

**Dec. 8** John Lennon assassinated 1980.

**Dec. 15** is Underdog Day this year.

**Dec. 16** is the birthday of a raft of famous people – composer Ludwig van Beethoven, author-inventor Arthur C. Clarke (2001: A Space Odyssey), anthropologist Margaret Mead, actress Liv Ullmann, journalist Leslie Stahl of "60 Minutes", actor-playwright-composer Noel Coward, and writer-philosopher George Santayana.

## Office of Child Support Web site has new faces

From Maria Candy  
DHS Office of Child Support, Lansing  
[CandyM@michigan.gov](mailto:CandyM@michigan.gov)

This past summer DHS Office of Child Support began a series of enhancements to the child support Web site to improve the quality of information and ease of navigation. The first enhancement included a redesign, update and addition of information to the site along with a capacity that allows the public to search for unclaimed support. Support is unclaimed when customers do not keep their address updated.

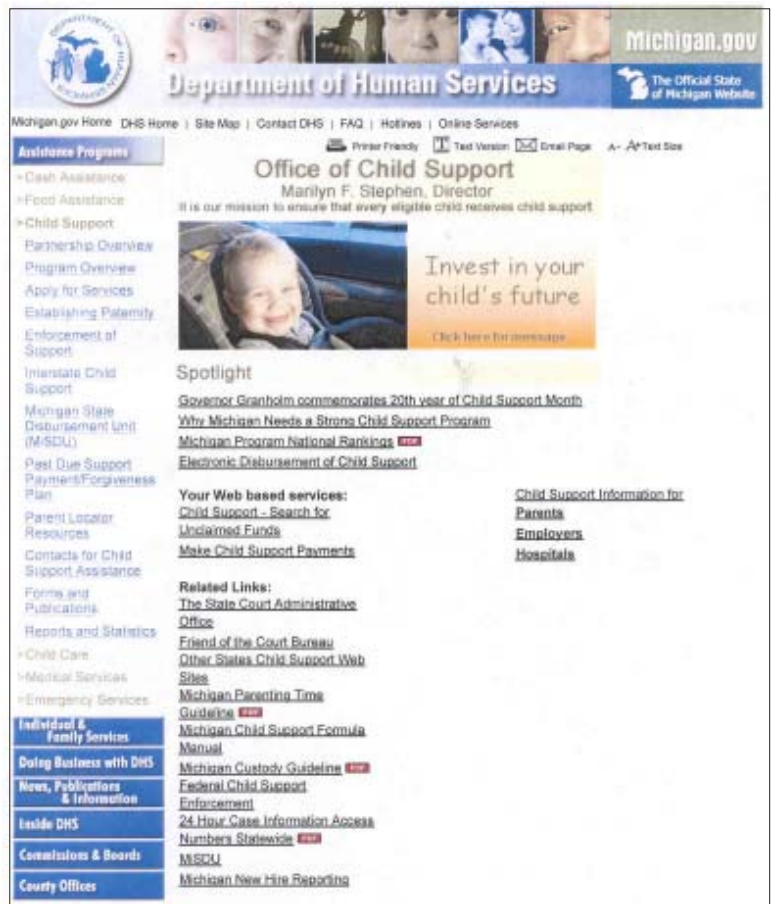
When locator efforts are not successful, by law, we can only hold the funds for one year and then we must escheat them to Treasury. While customers can claim the funds from Treasury at any time, we would like the money to get to families as soon as possible. Now, in addition to our efforts to find them, customers can search for themselves.

Because the child support program serves close to a million children in Michigan, we wanted to include pictures of children on the site. We had a dual goal of including pictures that had special meaning and to raise money for a good cause. The Office of Child Support "Cute Kids Contest" was born.

Staff members were allowed to submit pictures of children and vote as many times as they wanted for \$1 per vote. The contest raised \$400 for the Children's Trust Fund and provided unique and wonderful pictures that are now posted on the site. Sixteen pictures were selected and will rotate in two groups of eight over the next year.

In 2007 the site will allow customers to log on using a PIN and access their own case information that is only available now through an interactive voice response phone system. Future enhancements will include a capacity for customers to conduct child support transactions over the Web.

Please visit us at [http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5453\\_5528--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5453_5528--,00.html). We would welcome any comments or suggestions sent to Maria Candy at [CandyM@michigan.gov](mailto:CandyM@michigan.gov)



## Local office guard rewarded for heroic effort

BENTON HARBOR—Joe DePriest, a security guard at the DHS Berrien County office the past 20 years, was rewarded for heroic service Nov. 6. Benton Harbor Police Chief Al Mingo and Berrien County Prosecuting Attorney Art Cotter presented an award to DePriest, who saved two men from a burning building, during the Benton Harbor City Commission meeting.

DePriest earned plaudits from members of the community and the plaque he displays at right. "The heart of the community is a concerned citizen," Benton Harbor City Commissioner Billy Hill said during the presentation. "You are a hero."

DePriest was driving his wife to work April 30 at 4:45 a.m. when he saw a Benton Harbor house on fire and a woman sitting on the porch. The woman, who formerly had a relationship with one of the occupants, started the fire and bolted the door. DePriest opened the door, called to the occupants, and later called police who apprehended the alleged perpetrator, charging her with arson and two counts of attempted murder.

"I appreciate this," DePriest said. "But I was just doing what common sense would tell anyone to do in the situation." Others weren't so modest about his actions. "We are all very proud of Officer DePriest," Berrien DHS director **Jerry Frank** said. "This is what Joe *would* do; it is his character to support and help others."



**Joe DePriest with his award. A security guard at Berrien DHS, DePriest saved two men from a burning house last spring.**



**Date:** Nov. 27  
**To:** DHS Matters!  
**Subj:** Help from Wayne County

On Nov. 6 my family and I were burned out of our home and sent to a motel to stay for three days. I called my (case) supervisor at DHS, Mr. **Harold Weiss**, and this light voice got on the phone after him to ask me where I was located. This person was Ms. **Liz Robinson**; she was in my room in less than 10 minutes!

I was lost and confused and she put her arms around me and told me not to worry. I saw her make a call and this is where my life started again. Greystone DHS Wayne County (office staff) embraced me. I had never seen so much love for an individual in my life. Wayne County stepped up and I found myself in a home and furniture was being sent.

Nobody ever knows what will happen if everything was removed from their life. This story needs to be shared because it takes a village to aid an individual. As I pick up my life up today I smile inside because I know angels are in Greystone watching over me and they are in Wayne County everywhere. I would like to thank those who watched over me.

**Joanne Cooper**

Detroit

■ *Harold Weiss is a family independence manager with Wayne County DHS Greystone District in Detroit. The late Elizabeth (Liz) Robinson was special projects director for Wayne County DHS and was, at the time of her meeting with the writer, interim Greystone District manager. She died unexpectedly on Nov. 15.*

**Date:** Nov. 6  
**To:** **Shannon Gibson**  
**Subj:** Thanks!

Thanks a million for presenting on the needs of kids aging out of foster care and the resources available to them at our Family Group Decision Making cluster meeting Oct. 30. Now that FGDM will be serving this population it's critical that FGDM staff are familiar with the particular needs of this group and specific ways they can help them. It was great that you were able and willing to just jump in and share information.

Your passion for helping youth came through loud and clear and made your talk interesting and dynamic. Feedback on your presentation was very positive and I appreciate that you offered yourself as a possible resource for answers as well as all the information available online. I think staff left much more well prepared to work with youth than would have happened otherwise. Thanks again for being so easy to work with (and fun!). You're great.

**Nancy Rygwelski**, Family Preservation Specialist

Department of Human Services, Lansing

■ *Shannon Gibson is Chafee Program state coordinator with DHS Children's Services Administration.*

**Date:** Oct. 31  
**To:** Lapeer County DHS, Lapeer  
**Subj:** Retirement

Effective as soon as a replacement is appointed around November 1, 2006 I shall retire from the DHS/MCF Board. I shall miss you. It has been a blessing and a privilege for me to have spent five years with you advocating in my life's passion. Particularly rewarding has been observing your positive responses through hard times, staff loss, greater demands and advancing technology. Your dedication to clients and upbeat humor have been awesome and an inspiration to me.

You are a credit to the department and community. You are your client's greatest asset. Best wishes as you continue in your understanding and appreciation of the lives of those you serve. Empower them. Continue to give them hope. Thank you.

**Doris Rolland**, Vice-chair

Lapeer County DHS/MCF Board

■ *The author retired as a member of the Lapeer DHS Board, which is also the board for the county medical care facility (MCF). Lapeer DHS director Irene Bazan Waller submitted this letter for publication.*

Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise

**DHS Matters!** is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services  
Marianne Udow, Director • Karen Stock, Director, Office of Communications  
Larry VanDeSande, editor • Submit stories by e-mail to: [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)